

SUN TZU'S WAR THEORY IN THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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by

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ABSTRACT

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War theories have great impacts on warfare. They provide ways to think about issues, and advice on problem solving regarding wars and use of force. Fundamentally, modern war theories are based on cultures, observation of war behaviors, and technology. The core values of a war theory are still of the human dimension. Therefore, prevention of any armed conflict still tends to be human nature of 20th century and will continue toward the 21st century with 4th Generation Warfare. In accordance with "winning without fighting a battle" scenario, I will argue that the battle-prevention theory school is the most suitable, and Sun Tzu's classic *The Art of War* is the best choice of approach. This paper will further discuss why Sun Tzu's theory is so precious and applicable in terms of modern strategic environment and contemporary values of his sophisticated theory.

SUN TZU'S WAR THEORY IN THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY

“The art of war is of vital importance to the State. It is a matter of life and death, a road either to safety or to ruin. Hence it is a subject of inquiry which can on no account be neglected”.

Sun Tzu
The Art of War

War theories have a great impact on warfare. Usually they place things already known into systems; provide ways to think about conflicts, and provide advice on problem solving regarding wars and use of armed forces. Many people believe that once a theory no longer applies or fits the situation, a new theory emerges to supplement or replace it.¹ Generally, modern war theories are based on strategic cultures, historical lessons learned by observing war behaviors, and technology. As history progresses, the core values of war theory are still part of the human dimension.

It was early 1918 in the Western European Theater of the Great War. A young American aviator was flying his French-made biplane over countryside near French-German border. Underneath, a young, anxious, British infantryman standing up in a muddy trench line was waiting a signal whistle to assault their opponent's well defended positions. At the same moment, one of his exhausted German counterparts, in the same type of trench just a mile away, was fixing the bayonet on his Mauser against the enemy's upcoming attack. Were both participants of the trench fight able to predict what the future types of land warfare would look like in the jungles of Burma and in the dry desert of the Middle East decades later? Could both the British and their German counterparts foresee how a totally different type of warfare called the “Cold War” would dominate the course of human history for half century? Could the German soldier believe their “Yellow Gas” –the weapon of choice– would remain on every nation's agenda for almost a hundred more years and have an attentive name of “Weapon of Mass Destruction” (WMD)? Could that young American pilot visualize that, in early next century, his fellow offspring would be ambushed by a group of un-uniformed, poor-equipped terrorists named Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, and would engage in series of fierce streetfights among Shiite and Sunni sanctuary extremists, and radical insurgents in Iraq who are favorably using Improved Explosive Devices (IEDs) against Americans and their coalition partners? I wonder whether any of war theories could best tell them how future warfare is all about, and how to properly deal with it at that moment. Thus it is probably still too early for us to define what the best war theory is for the Twenty-first century. If not, we may have possibly been trapped into

the technology-driven myth, because we will never realize how far technology may go beyond our imagination.

Certainly, war is fought by human beings, not by machines or technology, although they may be decisive factors. After thousands of year, human nature remains essentially unchanged. The core of war theory is still based on the dimensions of human values, that is, how we look at and think of war. The first five decades of the Twentieth century left a history of bloody fighting and inhuman annihilation generated by wars. Weapons of overwhelming effect had thoroughly terrified mankind. The post-World War II situation of poverty, depression, and disturbance had further persuaded people that there are no winners in war. This explains why the United Nations (U.N.) was founded right after WWII. The U.N. is central to global efforts to solve problems and to prevent further armed conflicts that challenge humanity.² Therefore, the prevention of any armed conflict tends to derive from human nature in the late Twentieth century and will continue into the Twenty-first century.

Describing the theory which best explains the nature and conduct of war for this century, I will argue that the battle-avoidance theory school is the most appropriate one, and that Sun Tzu's classic *The Art of War* is the theory of choice in the twenty-first century. Using historical lessons learned in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, this paper will further review and discuss the values and applications of Sun Tzu's war theory in terms of the historical cases, modern strategic environment, and contemporary values.³

Historic overview of Sun Tzu

The name Sun Tzu ("Master Sun") is an honorific title bestowed upon Sun Wu, the author of the *Sun Tzu Ping Fa (The Art of War)*. According to Chinese tradition, Sun Tzu was a member of the "Shi" (intellect) during the consolidation of the Spring and Autumn Period (represented an era in Chinese history between 722 BC and 481 BC). He worked as a mercenary strategist (similar to a modern contracted military consultant or chief personal adviser) for King Helü of the Wu State (one of the 170 states during the Spring and Autumn Period) after finishing his thirteen chapters of military dissertation, known as the Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*.

During the Spring and Autumn Period on ancient China, the sovereignty of royal Zhou Dynasty (1066 BC~221BC) had become so decentralized that the weakening emperors of Zhou could no longer maintain their legitimate authority over subordinate states. All the kings of stronger states were attempting to become the hegemon in China. Although significant political struggles, large scale bloody armed conflicts, and brutal annexation often occurred among the

states, the slow crumbling of Zhou nobility ironically resulted in widespread literacy and encouraged freedom of thought and technological advancement for the Chinese. On one hand, the overall strategic environment during the Spring and Autumn Period was extremely complicated and confusing because of various interests of states and the non-state players, i.e. the group of “Shi” (including the famous Confucius) who always promoted their thoughts and strategies, sought for chances to rise, and benefited from inter-state political confrontations. On the other hand, in order to win brutal battles over their opponents and achieve the political ambitions, most of the kings had to wield their national powers to invent new weaponry, rapidly building up armed forces, organizing political alliances, and creating coalition partnerships. This environment, similar to modern times, would further provide great opportunities for the military strategists and thinkers, including Sun Tzu himself, to put their military thoughts and theories of war in practice.

Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* is a concise statement (fewer than forty pages in most of English translations, or 6,600 characters in the original Chinese text) on strategy written in sympathy style of Chinese classical writings. The subjects of these famous thirteen chapters are as following⁴:

1. Estimates
2. Waging war
3. Offensive strategy
4. Dispositions
5. Energy
6. Weaknesses and strengths
7. Maneuver
8. The nine variables
9. Marches
10. Terrain
11. The Nine Varieties of ground
12. Attack by fire
13. Employment of Secret agents

In history, Sun Tzu's work had been rewritten and further interpreted and explained by several Chinese military commanders, strategists, and scholars. Among them, the most famous one was Tsao Tsao, a Chinese general and later an emperor about A.D.200. As Chinese culture had spread out all over the Eastern Asia, military thinkers and worriers of Japan and Korea were believed deeply influenced and persuaded by Sun Tzu's war theory. Not until the

late Eighteenth century were Sun Tzu's writings introduced to the Western world. The first time Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* translated into a European language was in 1782, by French Jesuit Jean Joseph Marie Amiot. Since then, it has been translated and published in more than thirty different languages.

Sun Tzu possibly influenced Napoleon and even the war planners of Operation Desert Storm in 1991. In addition to its impacts on military professionals, leaders as diverse as Mao Zedong, Vo Nguyen Giap, and General Douglas MacArthur and General Colin Powell have declared to have drawn inspiration from the work. It was also on the reading list of general Tommy Franks, the commanding general of U.S. Central Command, who was responsible for planning and execution of both Operation Enduring Freedom in 2001 and Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003.⁵ B. H. Liddell Hart, the great British strategist and thinker, described Sun Tzu as the most concentrated essence of wisdom on the conduct of war, and only Clausewitz is comparable; but "the clarity of Sun Tze's thought could have corrected the obscurity of Clausewitz."⁶ He found many other points from Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* that coincided with his own lines of thought, particularly Sun Tzu's constant emphasis on doing the unexpected and pursuing the indirect approach in strategy—avoiding the enemy's strength and probing for weakness—Liddell Hart's most well-known assertion. At the end of his foreword to Griffith's translation, Liddell Hart also suggested "Sun Tzu is the best short introduction to the study of warfare, and no less valuable for constant reference on extending study of the subject."⁷ Even so, Sun Tzu's war theory is also very popular with business people nowadays in private sector, and strategists for team sports and political campaigns.

Twenty-first Century's Strategic Environment:

"You are living in the period of time that will produce more change for humanity than any previous era in history. It is a time of extraordinary importance that will fundamentally reshape almost every aspect of your life during the next two decades. Wholesale change is taking place in almost every segment of your reality-and the pace will only increase in the coming years."⁸

John Peterson
The Road to 2015

As we are entering the twenty-first century, the potentials for armed conflict among nation-states remain as serious challenge and difficult issues to address. In the face of the best efforts of many, differences in wealth, technology, and information create unstable conditions among nations. Additionally, the influences and powers of non-state actors have are increasing their regional and worldwide implications. Oftentimes, nations, non-state actors, and transnational

entities compete in the diplomatic, informational, military and economic (DIME) arenas of the modern strategic environment.

Since the end of WWII, the world has extensively and rapidly changed. Uncertainty is the defining characteristic of the current strategic environment. We identify trends but cannot predict specific events with precision.⁹ On one hand, the most obvious political changes are the creation and growth of international organizations, and non-state players that influence the international scene.¹⁰ Colin S. Gray points out the statecraft and war have several levels: political, strategic, operational, and tactical.¹¹ These levels overlap; their boundaries are sometimes so vague that they are not easy to clearly define. Failure at any level may negatively affect the other levels of war and lead to total defeat for a nation. On the other hand, the most remarkable technological change is information. All sectors of society are becoming networked on an international scale. One actor, behind the scenes, is able to remotely and swiftly manipulate all players on stage by way of computer based networks.

Under such constantly changing and irregular circumstance, we can best describe the strategic environment as volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA). This environment is very similar to the Chinese Spring and Autumn Period 2,500 years ago when Sun Tzu completed his classic war theory in an effort to prevent war among various players. Today, in the changing age, the new face of Twenty-first century warfare is Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW). This type of warfare uses all available networks—political, economic, social, and military—to convince the adversary’s political decision makers that their strategic goals are either unachievable or too costly for the perceived benefit.¹² This works in concert with Sun Tzu’s battle-avoidance war theory, and provides opportunity for its further demonstration and verification.

Accordingly, the current strategic environment resemble closely how it was two thousand years ago in China’s Spring and Autumn Period. Since the core values of contemporary warfare remain unchanged from those of ancient China, of which had proved effective and valuable during the time of Sun Tzu will also contribute them to modern warfare as well.

Contemporary Values of Sun Tzu’s War Theory:

Winning without fighting a battle: the battle-avoidance theory

“Generally in war the best policy is to take a state intact; to ruin it is inferior to this. To capture the enemy’s army is better than to destroy; to take intact a battalion, a company or a five-man squad is better to destroy them. For to win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill.”

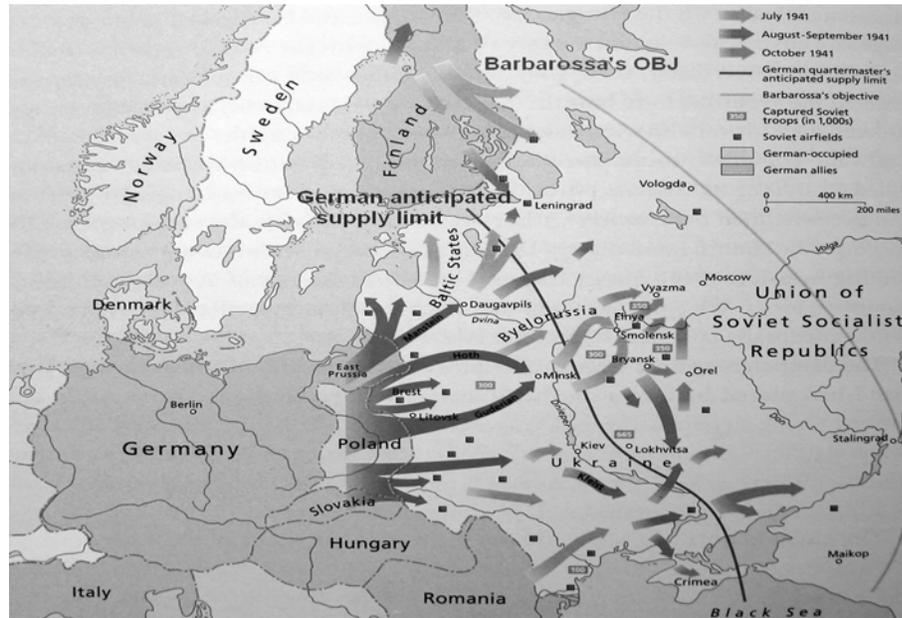
Sun Tzu's work covers all levels and spectrum of war. It provides fairly simple but applicable guidance from tactical aspects for the commander in the battlefield for waging war to strategic deliberations in the council chambers as to whether or not to wage war.¹³ Although this classic book does not offer cookbook approaches, today's war planners are still able to generate their course of actions from grand strategy and national security strategy, down to battlefield tactics by following Sun Tzu's theory. The most significant point is "winning without fighting a battle."

At the tactical level of war, it is very difficult to explain to soldiers how a rifleman can destroy his target without firing a bullet. At higher levels, however, this smart principle may provide more valuable thinking and workable options to the decision makers who are in control of both soft-powers and hard-powers. They will better use all elements of national power, the DIME, to achieve the nation's goals. The Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, the Haiti Crisis in 1994, and the Taiwan Straits Missile Crisis in 1996 were all excellent examples supporting Sun Tzu's "winning without fighting a battle" assertion. This also echoes today's U.S. military favorite doctrine for effects-base operations.

In the first chapter of his book, Sun Tzu warned that, "War is a matter of vital importance to the state; the province of life or death; the road to survival or ruin. It is mandatory that it be thoroughly study."¹⁴ Because of its importance, Sun Tzu also asserted that calculations are essential and necessary before the war is waged. The word "calculations" is better translated as "estimates" especially at operational and strategic levels. If estimates indicate the plan is not workable or too risky, then, the decision maker should not take any of necessary actions before all issues of risks are properly solved out. If not, he will put his force in jeopardy and will ruin his nation.

The case of the German invasion of the Soviet Union in July 1941 provides concrete evidence of how the failure of calculations can significantly influence the outcome of wars or operations. After Western Europe had fallen into the hands of Nazi Germany, Adolf Hitler was willing to turn his deadly war machine toward the Soviet Union. He then launched the famous Operation Barbarossa against Stalin. Strategically, with limited Nazi German resources, Hitler committed the fatal mistake by opening two separate fronts simultaneously against the Allied and Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the logistics estimate of the German general staff had advised him before the operations that German supply limit would be only pushed to the east of Kiev and Lkhvitsa, and could not sustain German's line of objectives (see graphic below). Hitler's

illogical determination and highly risky action not only resulted in the failure of Operation Barbarossa, but also predestined the extinction of the Third Reich.¹⁵



(German anticipated supply limit of Operation Barbarossa, 1941)

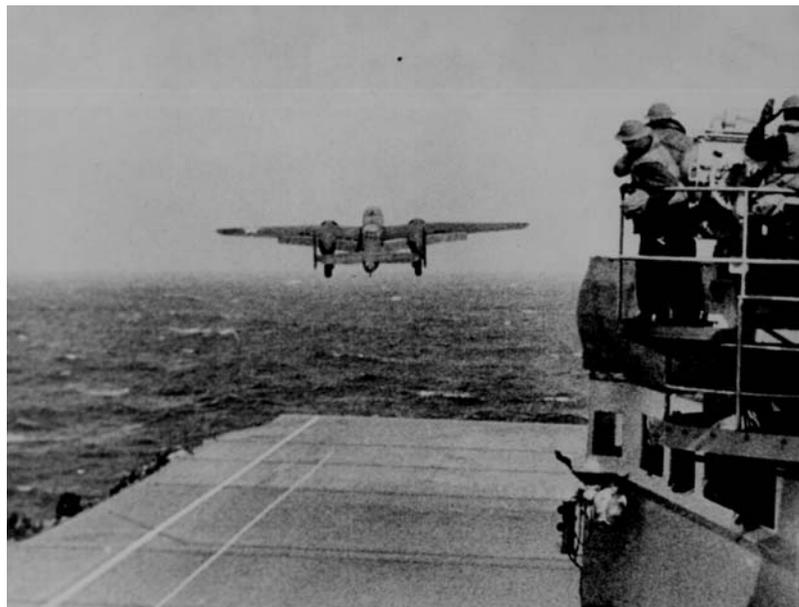
Attack enemy's strategy, and then disrupt his alliances.

*"Thus, what is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy's strategy. Next best is to disrupt his alliances. The next best is to attack his army. The worst policy is to attack cities. Attack cities only when there is no alternative."*¹⁶

Sun Tzu
The Art of War

When war is unavoidable, Sun Tzu taught us how to best win it. In his book he asserted that "the best way to conquer the enemy is to attack his strategy." This indicates that when one's strategies do not have significant benefits or advantages over the opponent's strategies, he may still win a battle but will eventually lose the war. Doolittle's bombing of the Japanese homeland on 18 April 1942 had no significant tactical effect. Apparently, it was to attack Japanese major cities on their homeland in return to their sneak attack on U.S. military bases in Pearl Harbor, 7 December 1941. Strategically, it was to disrupt and attack Japan's national military strategy and war plans by inserting sixteen U.S. Army Air Corps B-25 land-based medium bombers taking off from a navy aircraft carrier, the USS Hornet (CV-8), into the Japanese defense perimeter, which they perceived as water-tight. Led by legendary army aviator Lieutenant Colonel James Doolittle, this bold action caused a negative physiological effect on the Japanese far greater than the slight physical damage on bombing targets. It

successfully unbalanced the Japanese strategic centers of gravity, and quickly forced their military planners to alter their entire war strategy. After the Doolittle Raid, the Japanese dramatically deviated from their previous courses of war, and shifted their operational centers of gravity. Instead of going further south of Indochina region, they hastily attacked the Island of Midway. At the end of the Battle of Midway, the formerly victorious Japanese Imperial Navy lost four aircraft carriers and three thousand veteran aviators and seamen. It was not only great losses for Japan, but also was the turning point of the Pacific War which led to Japan's total defeat at the end of WWII. This shows that, having achieved strategic superiority, we can win the war without fighting necessary battles.



(A B-25 bomber taking off from USS Hornet in April 1942)

Another example regarding use of strategy is Operation Iraqi Freedom by the U.S.-led coalition forces in 2003. According to an interrogation after the war, the Iraqi strategic leadership repeatedly dismissed the threat of coalition forces staging in Kuwait posed to Bagdad, instead; they viewed the Iranians as the number one external adversary. Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein had initially calculated that he could maintain the ambiguity over his WMD program to deter the Iranians, his opponents at home, and other adversaries even as he complied with the letter of the U.N. inspection demands.¹⁷ Saddam's "deterrence by doubt" strategy encouraged suspicions within the U.S. Bush administration that the Iraqi leadership did have something to hide, and eventually subjected his regime to a total defeat by the U.S.-led coalition forces.

Today, the significance of building and protecting friendly coalition, and attacking enemy's alliance during the war has no difference from the Chinese Spring and Autumn periods. When

ones alliance or coalition has broken down, the nation fighting alone to win a war will have far more difficulties. During the first Gulf war in 1991, both the Iraqi leadership and U.S. General Norman Schwarzkopf precisely identified that the U.N. forces' theater strategic center of gravity was the coalition partnership. Launching his Scud missiles to attack Israeli built-up areas, Saddam Hussein intended to drag Israel into the fights. Once Israel struck back or joined the U.N. forces, Saddam Hussein could then instantaneously shift his war theme from invading Kuwait to the Israeli-Arab conflict. It would cause rapidly the Arab nations to leave the U.N. forces and dissolve the U.S.-led coalition. To counter Saddam's strategy and maintain the existing coalition, General Schwarzkopf had to deploy the U.S. Army Patriot missile units to protect Israel from Iraqi ballistic missile attacks, and sent out elements of combined special operations force to hunt down Iraqi Scud launching facilities.

Defeating Asymmetric Enemies

"Now there are five circumstances in which victory may be predicted: he who knows when he can fight and when he cannot will be victorious; he who understands how to use both large and small forces will be victorious; he whose ranks are united in purpose will be victorious; he who is prudent and lies in wait for an enemy who is not, will be victorious; he whose generals are able and not interfered with by the sovereign will be victorious."

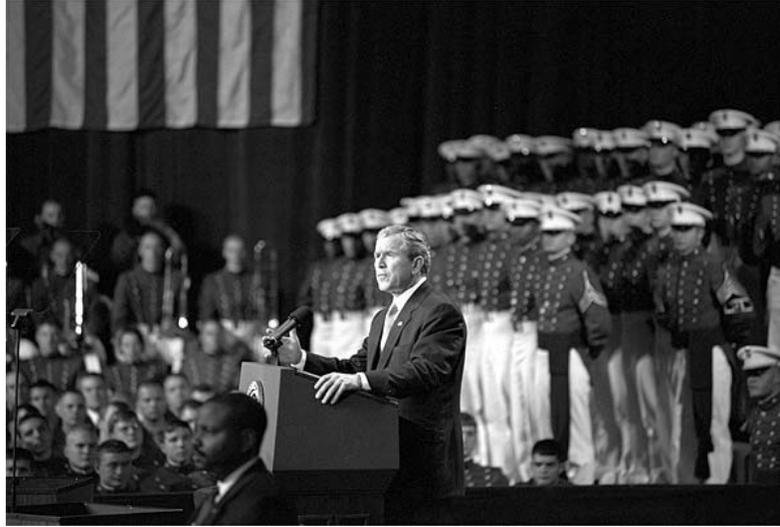
Sun Tzu
The Art of War

Carl von Clausewitz seemed to suggest that wars are fought only by nation-states; the Twentieth century's history of warfare, however, has proved that wars can also be fought by non-state actors against sovereign states, e.g. the Vietcong, the Irish Republican Army (IRA), the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and Al Qaeda. Modern war can occur between conventional regular armies, between regulars and irregulars, and between irregular opponents. Sun Tzu's "Chi" (the extraordinary force) and "Cheng" (the normal force),¹⁸ the same as Liddell Hart's direct and indirect approaches, best apply to all kinds of armed conflicts today, particularly when the weak attacks the strong.¹⁹ In his fifth chapter *Energy*, Sun Tzu further described the relation between these two different elements as "that the army is certain to sustain the enemy's attack without suffering defeat is due to operations of the extraordinary and normal forces" and "In battle, use the normal force to engage, but use extraordinary force to win."

Traditionally, like the June 6 1944 Allied invasion of Normandy on the D-day, regular forces are usually the main efforts tasked to conduct decisive operations while irregular or

extraordinary forces, such as French guerrilla organizations, U.S. Army airborne divisions and Ranger battalions, are assigned the supporting effort to execute shaping operations in support of the main effort. In the current changing strategic environment, smaller irregular forces may play more critical roles which decisively influence the outcome of war. Large scale regular forces will conduct other operations to fix or attrit the enemy in order to allow the smaller irregular elite forces to conduct decisive operations which will directly support the strategic commander's intent. This suggests the increasing importance of using unconventional forces, like Special Operations Forces (SOF), against crafty terrorists after the 9/11 attack in 2001. Nevertheless, military planners needed to realize that in modern warfare normal forces are oftentimes required to carry out irregular combat missions like their unconventional counterpart, and vice versa. In fact, more than sixty years ago his booklet *On Guerrilla Warfare*, the Chinese communist leader Mao Tze-Tung (1894-1975) had argued that "Orthodox forces may under certain conditions operate as guerrillas, and the latter may, under certain conditions, develop to the status of the former. However, both guerrilla forces and regular forces have their own respective development and their proper combinations."²⁰ It is believed that Mao was profoundly influenced by and followed Sun Tzu's war theory during his guerrilla type campaign. In fact, he developed his strategy against the outnumbered Chinese Nationalist Army by well utilizing Sun Tzu's elements of "Chi" and "Cheng." Mao's campaign plan was clearly divided in three phases: 1) political organization to seize initiatives; 2) conducting guerrilla warfare; 3) transition to regular operations to defeat enemy in decisive battles.²¹ Applying Mao's unique strategy and using guerrilla type irregular forces, the Chinese Communist Party successfully defeated General Chiang Kei-shak's U.S.-equipped Nationalist Army in 1949, and established their communist regime—the People's Republic of China (PRC)—in Beijing.

Sun Tzu's "Chi" and "Cheng" also refer to thinking unconventionally and acting irregularly while opposing threats like terrors and insurgents who usually utilize their asymmetric strength against our weaknesses. These threats, by their nature, attempt to increase and capitalize on uncertainty and ambiguity by exploiting and countering their opponents' technological and operational advantages. Sun Tzu wrote that "those skilled at making the enemy move do so by creating a situation to which he must conform; they entice him with something he is certain to take, and with lures of ostensible profit they await him in strength." He also advocated initiatives against the asymmetric enemy by bring them to the battlefield, not to be brought by them. Facing challenge of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) and today's 4GW, the U.S. strategic leaders must adapt critical and creative thinking to ensure their initiative and flexibility. This will further shape and create the strategic environment beneficial to us not the enemies.



(President George W. Bush addressing on GWOT at the Citadel)

In the speech to the cadets at the Military College of South Carolina (also known as the Citadel) in 2002, U.S. President George W. Bush put forth the challenge that the U.S. military must adapt different mindset in order to fight and win the long war. He clearly stated:

“To win this war, we have to think differently. The enemy who appeared on 9/11 seeks to evade our strength and constantly searches for our weaknesses. So America is required once again to change the way our military thinks and fights.”²²

This is the most decisive factor for us today to succeed in both counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism missions.

Use of Human Intelligence and Deceptions

“Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril. When you are ignorant of the enemy but know yourself, your chances of winning or losing are equal. If ignorant both of your enemy and of yourself, you are certain in every battle to be in peril.”²³

Sun Tzu
The Art of War

In his book *On War*, Carl von Clausewitz insisted that, “The commander must trust his judgment and stand like a rock on which the waves break in vain.”²⁴ Unlike Clausewitz, Sun Tzu emphasized the importance and advantages of intelligence. In addition to the previous statement, Sun Tzu also wrote a chapter regarding use of secret agents. His thoughts may refer to what currently are called human intelligence (HUMINT) and operational security (OPSEC) which have become more significant today. According to his book, the five sorts of human agents to be employed are native, inside, doubled, expendable, and living. Thus,

commanders who are using these sorts of secret agents well, and preventing the enemy from using them, will stand a much better chance of victory on the battlefield. Given the situation in both Afghanistan and Iraq, coalition forces rely heavily on solid and timely HUMINT to pursue their success in combating terrors and insurgents. Without reliable HUMINT, commanders may face not only the failure of a battle, but also extreme difficulty on waging modern war. The 9/11 attack has indicated that the lack of human agents deep inside the Al Qaeda terror organization left the U.S. “without eyes and ears.”²⁵ In his book *American Soldier*, General Tommy Franks wrote:

“I wish congress hadn’t decimated America’s human intelligence capability after the Cold War”, and “.....during that time the budgets and authority for intelligence collection—human intelligence, espionage, good old-fashioned.....have not kept pace with the threat. Certainly the United States saved money cutting back on human intelligence. But freedom is not free. It never has been.”²⁶

Saying “all warfare is based on deception”, Sun Tzu realized that an indispensable preliminary to battle is to attack the mind of the enemy. He highlighted, therefore, that when we are capable, make the enemy believe that we are incapable; when we are active, demonstrate that we are inactive; when we are leaving, mislead them to think that we are approaching them. In order to accomplish the deception plan, commanders must properly employ the elements of “Chi” and “Cheng”. Before ground offensive operations (the G-Day) of the first Gulf War in February 1991, General Schwarzkopf who is student of Sun Tzu skillfully deceived Iraqi ground forces by deploying several U.S. Navy SEAL teams to conduct a feint along the Kuwaiti coast line. This great deception contained Iraqi major combat units by fooling them into defending Kuwait which effectively prevented a huge human sacrifice of coalition forces during the following 100-hour ground battle.²⁷

Strategic leadership development

“There are five qualities which are dangerous in the character of a general. If reckless, he can be killed; if cowardly, captured; if quick-tempered you can make a fool of him; if he has too delicate a sense of honor you can calumniate him; If he is of a compassionate nature you can harass him. Now there five traits of character are serious faults in a general and in military operations are calamitous.”

Sun Tzu
The Art of War

In the current field manual on leadership, the U.S. Army defines strategic leadership as the highest-level thinkers, warfighters, and political-military experts. In an environment of

extreme VUCA, strategic leaders need to think in multiple time domains and operate flexibly to manage change. They not only need to experts in their own domain of warfighting and leading large military organizations but also need to be astute in the departmental and political environments of the national decision-making process. The contemporary VUCA strategic environment requires an in-depth knowledge of the elements of national power as well as the interrelationship among them. In short, strategic leaders not only should know themselves and their own organizations but also understand a host of different players, rules, and conditions.²⁸

As we discussed in previous paragraphs, war is fought by human beings not technology. Today, with more advanced technology, we need more competent leaders. Sun Tzu wrote many paragraphs about competencies required for the strategic leaders and civil-military (sovereignty-military) relations. The most noteworthy is in his first chapter, the *Estimates*, is that “If a general who heeds my strategy is employed he is certain to win. Retain him! When one who refuses to listen to my strategy is employed, he is certain to be defeated. Dismiss him.”²⁹ This idea best defines Unity of Command, one of the principles of war described in FM-3.0 “Operations”³⁰. Unity of command indicates that a single commander directs and coordinates the actions of all forces toward a common objective. At the strategic level, the supreme commander is the commander-in-chief, normally the head of state. In a civilian-controlled military, combatant commanders are subject to follow their lawful commander-in-chief; civilian sovereignty must delegate sufficient command authority to the combatant commanders to complete their missions. Thus, Sun Tzu said: “He whose generals are able and not interfered with by the sovereign will be victorious.”³¹

Another idea regarding leadership by Sun Tzu is found in his tenth chapter “Terrain”: “Because such a general regards his men as infants they will march with him into the deepest valleys (dangerous places). He treats them as his own beloved sons and they will die with him.” The most popular general in U.S. history, Confederate General Robert E. Lee, is among the best at applying this Sun Tzu’s principle.

Recommendations: Ancient Principles for Future Battlefields

Historically, the U.S. military has long implemented of Sun Tzu’s war theory in terms of its doctrine development and waging modern war, particularly in the post-Vietnam conflict era. Current GWOT operations against the enemies who are using 4GW, and engaging the newly rising regional powers such as the PRC and India will require U.S. leaders to be more adaptive, creative, flexible, and thinking irregularly. To accomplish this ideal and achieve greater success, not only U.S. military strategists but also government leadership must:

- Synthesize Sun Tzu's most significant strategic concepts in current campaign plans to win the war against asymmetric threat: military planners and policy-makers have to intelligently utilize the forces of "Chi" and "Cheng"; employ nation's hard powers and soft powers; avoid adversary's strength and seek his weakness; attack enemy's strategy, and then isolate him from his supporters and alliances; achieve strategic surprise and deceptions; always consider employing direct and indirect approaches; and pursuing the effect of winning without fighting a battle to reduce unnecessary risks and costs.
- Promote extensive studies on Sun Tzu's war theory in governmental institutions and military services for leadership competencies: recently U.S. Congressman Ike Skelton (D-MO 4th), the leader in the House on defense issues, has provided a National Security Book List to U.S. National Defense University. On his list, Sun Tzu is ranked at the highest position only second to the U.S. Constitution³². Regrettably, none of the U.S. services (including U.S. Coast Guard) has placed *The Art of War* on current their professional reading lists for senior leaders and flag officers. It is to suggesting that other senior governmental officials, i.e. the Bureau of Political and Military Affairs (PM) in the U.S. Department of State also be able to further comprehend and apply Sun Tzu's war theory.
- Improve the ignorance and shortfall of HUMINT to regain intelligence superiority over the opponents and potential threats: re-establish, reshape, and reorganize U.S. national intelligence policy and activities. Based on the lessons learned from 9/11 attack, national leaders must provide adequate resources and unified efforts on HUMINT capabilities in terms of intelligence collection and analysis methods. The U.S. military and governmental agencies should also foster their focused foreign languages training and cultural awareness programs by taking unique advantage of the diversity of ethnic groups in American society (the melting pot) to achieve this goal.

Conclusion:

Study the past, understand the future. There have been too many slaughters in history, and no one could claim to be a winner after such bloody battles. Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* covers all levels in the spectrum of war; his principles provide a guide to win all type of warfare. It fills the indirect approach gaps left by other theorists. His battle-avoidance theory has proved him to be the world's most enduring strategic thinker for almost 2,500 years. Although his book

does not provide step-by-step methods to study warfare, today's war planners should thoroughly study Sun Tzu's theory in terms of its unique perspectives of war, strategy, elements of strength, leadership, and use of intelligence. This age of VUCA environment requires broader flexibility of thoughts, deeper exploitation of intelligence, and wiser indirect approach in our preferred but appropriate war theory. All of above can be recognized in the writing of Sun Tzu's book; it is really the theory of choice for the Twenty-first century.

Endnotes

¹ Department of National Security and strategy, Course directive: Theory of war and strategy (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College, 2007), 1.

² The United Nations, "UN in Brief", available from <http://www.un.org/Overview/uninbrief/>; Internet, accessed 24 September 2006.

³ Herbert L. Rowe, *Military Information Technology Revolution* (Boulder: Rider Publishers, 2000), 2-3.

⁴ English quotations and translations of Sun Tzu cited in my presentation are based on the Samuel B. Griffith version of 1963.

⁵ Tommy Franks, "Part 3: Commander in Chief," in *American Soldier* (New York, NY: Haper Collins Publishers Inc., 2004), 203.

⁶ Samuel Griffith, "Foreword by B.H. Liddell Hart," in *Sun Tzu: the Art of War* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press. Inc., 1963), vi.

⁷ Griffith, vii.

⁸ National Defense University, "THE STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT", available from <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/ndu/strat-ldr-dm/pt1ch2.html>; Internet; accessed 24 September 2006.

⁹ DoD, *The National Defense Strategy of United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: the Department of Defense, 2005), 2.

¹⁰ Thomas Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone* (St. Paul, MN: Zenith Press, 2004), 35.

¹¹ Collin Gray, "Chapter 2, Strategy, Political, Ethics," in *Modern Strategy* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 61.

¹² Thomas Hammes, 2.

¹³ Patricia J. Cook, *Applying Sun Tzu's Ancient Art of War to the Future*, Strategy Research Project (Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College, 7 April 1999)

¹⁴ Griffith, 63.

¹⁵ Geoffrey Parker, "Chapter 15-The World in Conflict," in *Cambridge Illustrated History of Warfare* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: University Press, 2004), 314.

¹⁶ Griffith, 77.

¹⁷ Michael R. Gordon and General Bernard E. Trainor, "the Epilogue" in *Cobra II: the inside story of the invasion and occupation of Iraq* (New York, Pantheon House, 2006), 504.

¹⁸ Ibid, 91.

¹⁹ Gray, 159.

²⁰ Samuel Griffith, "Chapter 2: the relation of guerrilla hostilities to regular operations" in *Mao Tze-Tung On Guerrilla Warfare* (Champaign, IL: Universality of Illinois Press, 1961), 56.

²¹ Gray, 293.

²² George W. Bush, "President Speaks on War Effort to Citadel Cadets" 11 December 2001; available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/12/20011211-6.html>; Internet, accessed 28 December 2006.

²³ Griffith, 84.

²⁴ Michael Howard and Peter Part, "Chapter 6: Intelligence in War" in *Carl Von Clausewitz On War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Universality Press, 1989), 117.

²⁵ Mark McNeilly, "the War On Terrorism" in *Sun Tzu and the Art of Modern Warfare* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 210.

²⁶ Tommy Franks, 545, 555.

²⁷, "The Gulf War", available from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulf_War; Internet, accessed 24 September 2006.

²⁸ Department of the Army, "Chapter 7: Strategic Leadership", available from <https://atiam.train.army.mil/soldierPortal/atia/adlsc/view/public/9502-1/fm/22-100/ch7.htm>; Internet, accessed 2 February 2007.

²⁹ Griffith, 66.

³⁰ Department of the Army, "Chapter 2: Unified Action", available from <https://atiam.train.army.mil/soldierPortal/atia/adlsc/view/public/11636-1/fm/3-0/ch2.htm#par2>; Internet, accessed 8 March 2007.

³¹ Ibid, 105.

³² "The National Defense University Professional Military Reading List", available from <http://www.ndu.edu/Library/ReadingList/PMReadingList.html>; Internet, accessed 12 March 2007.